

# Recess Before Lunch

## Expected Benefits of the Recess Before Lunch Policy

- ★ **Fewer classroom discipline problems.** Children are more settled when they return to class after eating.
- ★ **Better classroom performance.** Children pay more attention to the lessons when they are not hungry.
- ★ **Better cafeteria behavior.** Children are ready to eat and not eager to leave lunch to go out and play.
- ★ **Greater nutrient consumption.** Children are ready to eat, and they eat more of the foods.
- ★ **Improved cafeteria atmosphere.** Students spend time eating and visiting, not rushing to get outside.

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## Montana Schools Are Reaping the Benefits of a Recess Before Lunch Policy

- ★ The teachers feel that the kids are more settled and ready to start afternoon classes. Principals and teachers also note improved behavior on the playground, in the lunchroom and in the halls.
- ★ Kids eat better! Plate waste studies have shown that the children do eat better (waste less food) and drink more milk. The decrease in food and milk waste has been **dramatic** in some cases.
  - ✓ Paxson School, Missoula, MT, food waste (garbage cans dropped from 12 to 3!)
- ★ The atmosphere in the lunchroom is more conducive to eating and is much more relaxed, as the kids are not rushing through lunch to get outside. The kids are actually **eating**. Most schools allow 25-30 minutes to eat.

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## **Steps to Implementing a Recess Before Lunch Policy**

- ★ Build support within your school and community.
  - i. Within the School
  - ii. Educate the Parents
  - iii. Within the Community
  - iv. Educate the Students
- ★ Plan the new recess and lunch schedule.
- ★ Include a hand washing plan in the lunch schedule.
- ★ Allow adequate time for the children to eat lunch.
- ★ Increase the presence of school staff in the lunchroom initially.

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## Practical Tips and Advice from Montana Schools

- ★ Scheduling tends to be the biggest hurdle to overcome. It is do-able; it just takes some creative planning. Expect the schedule to be a work in progress. No extra staff has been required as a result of the change.
- ★ Montana administrators, who have been successful in implementing Recess Before Lunch policies, recommend looking past the logistics of the scheduling change and concentrating on what is best for the kids.
- ★ It's important to get teachers' input and "buy-in" from the start. Really promote the improvement in kid's behavior on the playground and in the classroom, as well as more teaching time in the morning.
- ★ Food service staff from all of the schools has provided positive feedback and reported no problems from their end.

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## Practical Tips and Advice from Montana Schools

- ★ Younger kids (K-2) tend to “accept” the change in scheduling better than the older kids initially. Focus groups with Montana students have shown that the younger kids “perceive” the change in a more positive way.
- ★ Decide where to store cold lunches and lunch tickets/punch cards for easy access.
- ★ Some schools opt to take care of lunch money prior to recess. Others keep the accounting procedure the same. This has not been identified as a potential problem for scheduling in Montana schools.
- ★ Kids are likely to be hungrier with this change. Schools may opt to offer a mid-morning snack, along with promotion of the school’s breakfast program.